

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON - At 7:03 p.m., retiring Sen. Evan Bayh of Indiana told his colleagues that it had been a pleasure to work with them and moved to adjourn the Senate.

And with that, arguably the most productive Congress in decades came to a close. A quick look at some of the major agenda items accomplished:

- \* The biggest overhaul of the health care system since Medicare, the centerpiece of which included an amendment by Al Franken that at least 80 percent of health care premiums have to be spent on actual health care costs;
- \* Included in that - a provision to reward quality of health care that, once implemented, should see Medicare reimbursements to the Mayo Clinic and other top-notch Minnesota health care providers rise dramatically. It was the top priority for Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Reps. Betty McCollum, Tim Walz and Jim Oberstar.
- \* A sweeping financial overhaul package, though one that admittedly wasn't as tough or far reaching as many wanted;
- \* Much tougher rules restricting rate-gouging by credit card companies;
- \* Confirmation of two Supreme Court justices, including the first Hispanic justice in U.S. history. Franken presided over both votes in the Senate;
- \* Multiple stimulus bills, including the original, cash-for-clunkers, the first-time homebuyers tax credit (and extension of same) and a two-year extension of the Bush tax cuts;
- \* A landmark food safety overhaul;
- \* 9/11 first responders health care bill;
- \* Legislative repeal of the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell regulations;
- \* START nuclear oversight treaty with Russia;

Many of these legislative actions were extremely controversial, and certainly Democrats paid a price at the polls for passing some of it. But of the many things one could say of this Congress, unproductive certainly isn't one of them.